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INFO RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE  
RUEHGG/UN SECURITY COUNCIL COLLECTIVE  
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 2379  
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RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 9439  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L RANGOON 000028

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SUBJECT: BURMA: THREE NLD ACTIVISTS SENTENCED TO PRISON

Classified By: Political Officer Marc Shaw for Reasons 1.4 (b) & (d)

¶1. (C) Embassy Rangoon confirmed media reports that an Insein Township Court sentenced three National League for Democracy (NLD) members on January 13 to three years imprisonment with hard labor. Each was charged with violating the "Unlawful Associations Act," which makes it illegal for anyone to be a member of, associate with, or give or receive assistance to an unlawful association. (Note: In Burma, all associations must be registered with the government; any unregistered group is therefore unlawful.)

¶2. (SBU) Shwe Joe, Sein Hlaing, and Ma Cho (aka Ma Myint Myint San) allegedly communicated with the NLD in exile and accepted illegal contributions. According to media reports, the defendants' attorney, Kyaw Hoe, said no civilians testified during the trial and the government presented no evidence to support its charges. The verdict was based solely on police testimony, he claimed.

¶3. (C) Opposition lawyer Aung Thein told us January 14 that the defendants' lawyers will appeal the verdict to a higher court. He said the defendants are members of the NLD's social assistance committee and have denied the charges being levied against them. Human Rights Defenders and Promoters member Maung Maung Lay informed us the three drew the ire of authorities for assisting families of political prisoners and others. The police reportedly arrested them on March 6, 2009; they have been detained at Insein prison since that time.

DINGER